

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oct. 3, 2005

For More Information Contact

VDH 05-25

James B. Farrell, Division of Immunization Director (804) 864-8055

Jimeequa Williams, PIO, (804) 864-7897

**THE VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RECOMMENDS FLU
VACCINATION**

(RICHMOND, Va.)—As the flu season approaches, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) is advising everyone to get vaccinated, especially those people who are at risk of developing complications from influenza. Vaccination is the best way to prevent influenza, or the flu, and its potentially severe complications.

The vaccine is now available from most physicians, local health departments and many local pharmacies. Until Oct. 24, VDH is asking vaccine providers to give the first available doses to people in high-risk groups and to health care providers who have contact with patients in those groups. Beginning Oct. 24, all Virginians will be eligible for vaccination. However, citizens should check with their local physician or local health department to gauge the status of vaccine supply and to determine which patients will be provided with vaccine. Providers will be receiving vaccine throughout the season and supplies may vary at times.

“While almost everyone can benefit from vaccination, we encourage those most at risk for complications from the flu to be vaccinated sooner rather than later. People at high risk are more vulnerable to serious illness or even death from the flu,” said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H.

Influenza can cause fever, cough, sore throat, headache, chills and muscle aches. Unlike the common cold, the flu causes severe illness and can be life threatening. Complications from the flu can lead to pneumonia and other serious illnesses, such as infections of the brain and heart. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, influenza causes an average of 36,000 deaths and more than 200,000 hospitalizations each year in the United States. More people die from complications from the flu than from any other vaccine-preventable disease.

The flu is caused by a highly contagious virus that is spread easily from person to person, primarily when an infected individual coughs or sneezes. The virus can be transmitted even before flu-like symptoms appear. Immunization provides the best protection against influenza.

(more)

Until Oct. 24, flu shots will be prioritized for people at increased risk, including:

- People 65 years of age or older
- Children 6 to 23 months old
- Residents of long-term care facilities
- People with chronic cardiovascular or pulmonary disease, including asthma;
- People with chronic metabolic diseases such as diabetes, kidney dysfunction, blood disorders or immune system problems
- Children and adolescents who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy
- Women who will be pregnant during the flu season
- Health care professionals and any household contacts or care providers of children under 6 months of age, to help prevent the spread of influenza to patients who may have existing health conditions and children who are too young to be vaccinated.

There are two types of flu vaccine available in the United States and their formulas are changed each year to attack the strains of the virus that are in circulation. This is why it is important to be vaccinated every year.

The traditional influenza vaccine, called the flu shot, is an injection containing an inactive, or killed, form of the virus. A spray vaccine is also available containing a weakened form of a live virus that is sprayed into the nostrils as a fine mist. The nasal spray vaccine is approved for healthy children and adults 5 through 49 years of age, while the flu shot can be used for children aged 6 months and older and adults. The prioritized recommendations for vaccinations do not apply to the nasal vaccine.

The best time to receive influenza vaccine is during October and November, however vaccination in December, or even later, can still prevent the flu. January and February are typically peak flu months in Virginia, but increased flu activity can last into March. Protection develops about two weeks after vaccination and may last up to a year.

Most people need only one dose of vaccine to prevent influenza. However, children younger than 9 years getting flu vaccine for the first time will need a booster dose either a month or six weeks after their first dose depending on the type of vaccine received.

For more information, visit www.vdh.virginia.gov. Additional resources, including a vaccine clinic locator, may be found on the American Lung Association's web page <http://www.flushotsvirginia.org> or by calling (800) LUNG-USA.

###